

Post-14 transitions support – a survey of visiting teacher services for blind and partially sighted students

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Citation for published version (Harvard):

Hewett, R & Douglas, G 2010, Post-14 transitions support – a survey of visiting teacher services for blind and partially sighted students. VICTAR.

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Post-14 transitions support – a survey of visiting teacher services for blind and partially sighted students

Report for RNIB

October 2010

Authors:

**Rachel Hewett
Dr Graeme Douglas**

Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR)
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Birmingham, B15 2TT

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people who have supported this project.

Firstly, we would like to recognise the contribution given by the Visual Impairment Support Services, Resource Bases and Special School in their participation of the survey we conducted, which forms the basis of this report.

Thank you to the RNIB for funding this project, and to Stephanie Cheddie, Rory Cobb, Nicola Crews, Sophie Dymont, Elizabeth Clery, Pat Dyson, Sue Keil, Alex Saunders, Philippa Simkiss and Sue Wright for their guidance through the steering group.

We would also like to thank Ben Clements who coordinated the initial survey of the services.

Executive summary

This is a report commissioned by RNIB in relation to post-16 transitions from school into further and higher education, training and employment of blind and partially sighted students. The research project was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and VICTAR (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research, at the University of Birmingham) in response to the Research Brief prepared by RNIB Corporate Research Team: “Longitudinal study from age 14 of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK”. The research started in May 2009 and is being carried out in three phases of work:

- Phase 1 – Recruitment and survey of education services.
- Phase 2 – Survey of young people with vision impairment.
- Phase 3 – Longitudinal case studies.

This report presents data in relation to Phase 1 of the project, i.e. the survey of the statutory specialist visual impairment agencies involved in supporting students with visual impairment in their schools. The survey was particularly concerned with the transition planning which is offered to students with visual impairment at the ages 14-16 years (school year 9, 10, and 11).

A questionnaire was completed by 18 Local Authority visiting teacher services (VTS) for students with visual impairment, 2 Resource Bases for students with visual impairment attached to mainstream schools, and 1 Special School for students with a visual impairment. All the participating services were recruited from the English Midlands regions or Wales.

The questionnaire collected information in relation to:

1. The support services for students with a visual impairment
2. Post-16 transitions policies and links
3. Statements, annual review and transition planning
4. Work placements
5. Other support and advice
6. General reflections about the quality of the services and other comments.

1. Support services for students with a visual impairment

- Unsurprisingly, the 21 survey responses included services of varying sizes, e.g. VTS ranged in terms of numbers of teaching staff (ranging from 1 to 12 full time teachers) and numbers of students supported in years 9 and 11 (ranging from 1 student to 43 students).
- The data shows that the proportion of students with a visual impairment receiving a statement of special educational need differs across local authorities. More detailed research would be required to clarify the nature of these differences in statementing policy. However, preliminary follow-up discussions with heads of service indicate that some services have 'low statementing policies' in which support offered to students is not linked to the presence or absence of a statement.
- Given these different statementing policies, any overall patterns across the surveyed VTS which link transition planning and statementing cannot be generalised to all VTS: in many authorities a statement is important in gaining access to transition services, while in some it is not relevant. Nevertheless, there is evidence that in authorities where statements are used less it may be necessary for the VTS to work proactively with schools and other agencies to ensure students are able to access transitions services.
- All eligible students at the Resource Base and Special School had statements of special educational need.

2. Post-16 transition policies and links

Policies for post-16 transition support

- Some local authorities appear to have more developed policies in relation to post-16 transition support than others, although some VTS draw upon more general policies, rather than having visual impairment specific ones.

Connexions

- The level of reported partnership with Connexions differs across the VTS, with Connexions Officers attending annual review meetings for students with visual impairment students more regularly in some local authorities than others.
- On the whole, Connexions Officers are more likely to attend annual review meetings for students with statements (compared to students without statements).

- The level of contact that the VTS have with Connexions outside of the annual review meetings also seems to vary between the different local authorities.
- The Resource Bases and Special School all have Connexions Officers linked to their school (and consequently report greater level of contact).

Section 140 of Learner Support Plan (now Section 139a)

- The amount of input given by VTS in the production of the Learner Support Plan appears to differ across the local authorities, although they will offer greater advice for those students with a statement. The advice VTS give tends to be specific to the students needs, such as mobility training, and information for sitting exams.
- It is rarer, however, for VTS to provide *written* contributions to the Learner Support Plan.

3. Statements, annual review and transition planning

Annual reviews

- Overall, representatives from the VTS report attending annual reviews for most students with a statement, but are less likely to attend for those without a statement.
- Overall, Connexions officers are reported to attend annual reviews less frequently, particularly for non-statemented students.
- Staff from the resource bases and special school report always being in attendance at an annual review, along with the Connexions Officers attached to the schools.

Transition plans

- Over 80% of the services reported that transition reviews are typically held as part of the annual review meeting for Year 9, 10 and 11 students with a statement, but the practice varies a lot more for those without a statement.
- The students at both resource bases and the special school (all of whom had statements) would usually have their transition review as part of the annual review meeting.
- Most VTS give input in the preparation of transition plans, in particular for those with statements (although policies differ between the local authorities). The majority also reported that they found the transition plans useful in delivering their service.
- Overall, the VTS reported they were confident in their level of involvement in transition planning for students with visual impairment

with a statement, but only 50% are confident in their level of involvement for those students without a statement.

- Students with statements have a statutory entitlement to specialist support in relation to transition planning, including access to services from other agencies (e.g. Connexions). Given this, is access to this specialist transition support limited for non-statemented students with a visual impairment in authorities with a 'low-statementing policy'? Follow-up discussions with some heads of service with a 'low-statementing policy' indicate that in these authorities the statement is not a factor in a student's ability to access these services, although it is necessary for the VTS to work proactively with schools and other agencies to ensure that this is the case.

4. Work placements

- Those students linked to a VTS or Resource Base were highly likely to have a work placement at some point between Year 9 and 11.
- The VTS reported that finding suitable work placements for their students with visual impairment was difficult.
- The level of support provided by the different VTS in terms of work placements varied, with some having much more involvement than the others.
- Similarly, the range of career activities (e.g. links and visits to FE and sixth form colleges, careers fairs/conventions and links with voluntary work) that are available to Year 9 to 11 students appears to differ according to where they are located.

5. Other support and advice

- Several of the VTS report being involved in providing support and advice to the other services involved in supporting students with visual impairment. Advice is given, in particular, to FE or HE Staff.
- The advice given ranges from advice and support regarding specific young people, to general advice and support including awareness training.

6. General reflections about the quality of the services and other comments.

- There appears to be a consensus amongst VTS respondents that the transition support for students with visual impairment could be improved, particularly by Connexions and the local mainstream school.

- Similarly, many suggest that the quality of links between agencies (VTS-Connexions links in particular) needs to be improved.
- Several of the services highlighted the potential problems of young people moving onto larger post-16 colleges, where the support that they are entitled to is less clearly defined.

1 Background

This is a report commissioned by RNIB in relation to post-16 transitions from school to further and higher education, training and employment of blind and partially sighted students. The research project was designed in 2009 by a team from RNIB and VICTAR (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research at the University of Birmingham) in response to the Research Brief prepared by RNIB Corporate Research Team: “Longitudinal study from age 14 of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK”. The research started in May 2009 and is being carried out in three phases of work:

- Phase 1 – Recruitment and survey of education services.
- Phase 2 – Survey of young people with vision impairment.
- Phase 3 – Longitudinal case studies.

This report presents data in relation to Phase 1 of the project, i.e. the survey of the statutory specialist visual impairment agencies involved in supporting students with visual impairment in their schools. The survey was particularly concerned with the transition planning which is offered to students with visual impairment at the ages 14-16 years (school year 9, 10, and 11).

1.1 Why is transition planning important for students with visual impairment?

The Network 1000 project estimated that the employment rate of people who are registered blind or partially sighted (and of working age) is just 33% (see Douglas et al, 2009). A further key finding was that those who are not working become more distant from the labour market over time, indicating the importance of people with visual impairment gaining employment as quickly as possible, in order to prevent long term unemployment.

Shaw et al (2007) in a study into Employment for youths with visual impairment in Canada found several barriers or challenges to employment, including restricted resources (material equipment, or information), attitudes of employers or potential employers, job requirements (such as needing a drivers license), lack of tolerance and problems of transportation.

Pavey et al (2009) found that young people with visual impairment even with good educational qualifications reported that they were having difficulty in gaining employment. They suggested that low employment levels within the blind and partially sighted community could be explained by external factors, and concluded that 'there is still much to be done to help these young adults to participate in society on an equal footing with their sighted counterparts.'

1.2 Theories on transition planning

McGinty and Fish (1992) define transition as:

“...a phase or period of time between the teens and twenties which is broken up educationally and administratively. During the phase there are changes of responsibility from child to adult services, from school to further and higher education and from childhood dependence to adult responsibility...a process by which the individual grows through adolescence to adulthood and achieves the balanced state of dependence and independence which a particular community expects of its adult members.”

Dee (2006) suggests three models of transition:

1. Phase-related model of transition. This model presents transition as a continuous journey, with a number of stages which a person can pass through as they move into adulthood. This could include, for example, paid employment, starting a family, and living independently. This model is reflected in the UK's transition process which starts early when the child is 13, and then continues for a number of years.

2. Agency-related model of transition. The agency-related model is one which has evolved over time as society has developed. Initially, sociologists suggested that people were restricted in the amount of control that they have over the direction which their life takes due to factors such as their social class, gender and ethnicity. In recent years sociologists have found that these factors are having less of an influence and individuals have more power in determining their own path. However, this is unfortunately only the case for those who are in 'mainstream society', and those on the 'fringes', (and this may include people with disabilities) still have lesser control over the direction that their lives take.

3. Time-related model of transition. This model proposes that there are three different dimensions of time which can impact on a person's

transition. These are historical time (the impact that circumstances in society can have, such as legislation and the economy), life time (the natural changes which come about as a result of getting older), and social time (the different stages which come about as you move through life, such as the need to get a job and choosing to live independently).

1.3 Transition Planning in the UK

The nature of the statutory transition support available to a young person with a visual impairment is largely determined by whether they are statemented or not. The government guidance to parents regarding statements reads that 'a statement of special educational needs (*SEN*) sets out your child's needs and the help they should have. It is reviewed annually to ensure that any extra support given continues to meet your child's needs' (Directgov, 2010).

The statementing process is carried out at a local authority level and can be requested by parents under the Education Act 1996. The local authority will make an assessment of the child's needs, and usually within 12 weeks will make a decision about whether the child has sufficient needs to be statemented or not.

For those young people in the UK with a statement the transition process starts at the point at which the student turns 13, when they are in Year 9. This is all covered by the DfES *SEN* 'Code of Practice'. It is the responsibility of the students' school to arrange the transition meeting, and invite along all relevant people. Normally this would include the child, the child's parents or carers, the staff from the school, a personal advisor from Connexions, and any other relevant agencies. For students with visual impairment this would normally be a Qualified Teacher for the Visually Impaired (QTVI), who would likely have built up a relationship with the student through supporting them at school. Transition planning is intended to be multi-agency, but responsibility is left to the head teacher (or delegate, for example the school's SENCO) to invite the relevant people along. Following this meeting, the school would draft up a written transition plan. It is then the responsibility of Connexions to ensure that this is followed through.

This is an annual process, up until the point at which the student chooses to leave school. Students who choose to go onto Further Education Colleges are not eligible for a transition review once they have left school and entered college.

One important assessment that takes place is Section 139a (previously Section 140) of the Learner Support Plan. This is an assessment which looks at the young persons educational and training needs, and the support which is required to help them with those needs. It comes as part of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and asserts that arrangements must be made to assess young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This should be carried out for all young people with a Statement and also young people in mainstream schools who have recognised learning difficulties or disabilities which require support.

The governmental document 'A transition guide for all services' offers advice for transition support. They recommend that:

"To make sure disabled young people get the support they need as a matter of course, all agencies need to make two activities a priority:

- Listen to what disabled young people say they want
- Work positively together across agencies"

Department of Health, 2007, p2

One important aspect that they highlight is that transition reviews should be 'people-centred'. This means that the transition review should be conducted with the wishes and the needs of the individual at the centre. For example, instead of considering the services which are already in existence and where the young person would best fit into these, consideration should instead be in terms of what services could be given to the young person to help them best to meet their objectives.

Unfortunately there is evidence that the transition system is not working as well as could be hoped. DfES (2004) found that 'examples of relatively smooth transitions seem to be the exception rather than the rule.' Those who were continuing in education, on the whole appeared to have a relatively smooth experience, but there were concerns that in continuing on in education they were simply delaying the transition process they would eventually follow.

Ofsted (2010) 'identified weaknesses in transition planning for young people, and the need for greater knowledge and professional expertise in relation to special educational needs and disabilities in information, advice and guidance services'.

1.4 Role of QTVI's and specialist services in Transition Planning

A Qualified Teachers of Visually Impaired Students (QTVIs) 'is a teacher who has received specialist training and holds an additional qualification to work with children with sight problems. Some teachers of children with visual impairments are based in schools – others are known as visiting or peripatetic teachers.' (RNIB, 2010)

Students with visual impairment can have very particular needs and issues, which need a specialist input. A QTVI should have good understanding of the condition the young person has, the barriers they have, but also the ways in which these barriers can be overcome.

Keil and Crews (2008) especially highlight the importance of QTVIs. They found that 'during and after transition, young people should have access to a trusted person to act as mentor, a role that may also be best fulfilled by the advisory QTVI'.

2 Project Overview

2.1 RNIB Transitions Project

This report comes as part of a longitudinal study from aged 14 of blind and partially sighted young people in the UK. This project is funded by the RNIB and commissioned to VICTAR, University of Birmingham. The key objectives of the project are:

- To track the process of transition for blind and partially sighted young people from age 14 for five years
- To identify the roles of professionals involved
- To identify the factors that improve or reduce a young person's chance of gaining employment

The project includes the following key phases:

1. Recruit and survey visual impairment services
2. Through these services, recruit and survey a sample of Year 9 and 11 students with visual impairment
3. Follow-up surveys of the sample of students with visual impairment

This report presents findings from phase 1, i.e. the survey of the statutory specialist visual impairment agencies involved in supporting students with visual impairment in their schools. This includes (a) Visiting Teacher Services provided by Local Authorities, (b) Visual Impaired Resource Bases attached to mainstream schools, and (c) Special Schools for students with visual impairment. Its objective was to get a better understanding of these agencies views of the support young people with visual impairments receive in relation to transitions.

2.2 Method

Letters were sent to different local authorities, resource bases and special schools within the England Midlands and Wales to see if they would be willing to take part in the project. Twenty-six service providers were approached, and in all, positive responses (and eventual questionnaires) were received from 18 local authorities, 2 resource bases and 1 special school.

A questionnaire was sent to each head of service (or head of school or resources base) in Autumn 2009. They were requested to complete the questionnaire and return to the research team at VICTAR. The

questionnaire (see Appendix) focused on post-16 transitions and students with visual impairments (years 9-11), and consisted of the following five sections:

- 1 The support services for students with visual impairments
- 2 Post-16 transitions policies and links
- 3 Statements, annual review and transition planning
- 4 Work placements
- 5 Other support and advice

As well as a final set of questions in relation to:

- 6 General reflections about the quality of the services and other comments.

The responses given in the questionnaire were entered into SPSS and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings are presented in tables which contain frequencies of responses. We also include percentages to help comparison of responses across questions. However, given the low number of participants (just 23), the interpretation of percentages must be done very cautiously.

3 Main Findings

3.1 Support services for students with a visual impairment

Size of Service (Staffing)

The authorities were asked to give an account of the staff who worked there. This is to give an indication of how big the service is and provide a useful comparison to see if service provision differs according to size.

Table 1: Staff working at the VI Services

	Staff Total	QTVIs	FTE of Teachers
Service 1	17	12	9.8
Service 2	1.5	1	1
Service 3	11	6	6
Service 4	15	8	7.2
Service 5	30	7	7
Service 6	6	4	2
Service 7	13	9	8.8
Service 8	13	4	12
Service 9	48	5	5
Service 10	15	7	4.4
Service 11	11	7	5.6
Service 12	16	7	6
Service 13	6	3	2.1
Service 14	-	11	9.7
Service 15	7	3	3
Service 16	11	6	4.1
Service 17	6	5	3.4
Service 18	11	6	4.8
Res Base 1	11	2	1.4
Res Base 2	8	1	1
Special School	38	26	28.5

Note: - = no data given

Of the 18 Local Authorities surveyed, six had schools which had resource bases attached to them. Of these six local authorities, in three cases the staff in the resource bases were managed by the visiting teacher service, whilst in three cases staff were managed by the host school. Both resource base 1 and 2 are managed by their host school.

Number of students and Statementing

As has been highlighted in the introduction, the level of support which a person with a visual impairment receives in the transition process can depend on whether they are statemented or not. Statementing is dealt with at a Local Authority level.

The following table shows the proportions of Year 9 and 11 students who are statemented.

Table 2: Proportions of Year 9 and 11 students with visual impairments who have a statement - by Local Authority

Local Authority	Total number of Year 9 students	Proportion of Year 9 Students who are statemented (%) (n)	Total number of Year 11 students	Proportion of Year 11 students who are statemented (%) (n)
Service 1	-	-	-	-
Service 2	1	100.0% (1)	0	0.0%
Service 3	7	28.6% (2)	5	60.0% (3)
Service 4	16	0.0% (0)	17	0.0% (0)
Service 5	3	66.7% (2)	15	73.3% (11)
Service 6	2	50.0% (1)	2	50.00% (1)
Service 7	13	61.5% (8)	16	56.3% (9)
Service 8	6	50.0% (3)	8	50.0% (4)
Service 9	-	-	-	-
Service 10	19	63.2% (12)	-	-
Service 11	11	0.0% (0)	19	15.8% (3)
Service 12	10	60.0% (6)	11	27.3% (3)
Service 13	7	28.6% (2)	6	16.7% (1)
Service 14	22	27.3% (5)	21	28.6% (6)
Service 15	3	33.3% (1)	11	36.4% (4)
Service 16	12	33.3% (4)	5	20.0% (1)
Service 17	9	66.7% (6)	8	50.0% (4)
Service 18	11	9.1% (1)	10	0.0%(0)

Note: - = no data given

Most obviously, the table demonstrates the range of sizes of the services surveyed – e.g. Service 14 (a large county authority) supported 43 students with visual impairments in Years 9 and 11, while service 2 (a low population rural authority) only had one student in these years. This is reflected in the staffing reported in the previous section.

In terms of statementing we have no indication of the nature of the individual young people's *SEN* (e.g. the extent of the visual impairment), therefore from this data we couldn't be sure whether the statementing policies are different across LAs or not. Nevertheless, we can see very big differences in proportions of young people who are statemented in different LAs. For example, Services 4 and 11, have very low proportions of students with statements. In contrast, Services 5, 10, 12 and 17 have relatively high proportions.

Follow-up telephone discussions with four VTS provided more information in relation to statementing policies. For example, Service 4 reported that the figures were an unusual 'blip', and it was usual to have around 40% of students with statements in a given year group. In contrast, Services 11, 13 and 18 all had policies which actively sought to limit the number of students with statements. The specific reasons for this varied, but broadly speaking the services were avoiding the costly process of statementing for many students because services could be provided without them, i.e. the level and nature of service provided to students was not linked to the absence or presence of a statement. These different approaches to statementing means that findings presented within this report must be analysed very carefully, particularly when links are made to statementing (because a statement means different things in different local authorities). This theme is returned to elsewhere in the report.

Only one of the Resource Bases gave numbers of the students that they support, but out of all five Year 9 and 11 students, all of them are statemented. Similarly, out of the 16 students at the Special School, all students were statemented except one, and this was due to a child attending the school from outside the UK.

3.2 Post-16 transitions, policies and links

Policies for post-16 transition support

Information was gathered about local authority general policy statement in relation to:

- post-16 transitions support in general
- post-16 transitions support specifically for young people with *SEN*
- post-16 transitions support specifically for young people with visual impairments

Of the 18 visiting teacher services surveyed, 11 reported their local authority had a general policy statement on post -16 transitions (with another 6 who were unsure). Twelve reported having a general policy statement on post-16 transitions for *SEN*, while 8 reported having a general policy statement on post-16 transitions specifically for students with visual impairments (4 were unsure or did not respond).

From the responses given it is apparent that some local authorities have more developed post-16 transition policies than others. Nevertheless, it is not always clear whether these are specific to students to visual impairments or not. For example, one Local Authority with a general policy statement on post-16 transitions for visual impairment made the following comment on their transition support:

Service 1:

The LA has put in lots of work and training around transition pathways over the last 2 years through TRANSITION PATHWAYS. This has been rolled out through special schools and going onto mainstream schools.

Resource base 1 follow the general policy statement of the school on post-16 transitions support, but have nothing specific for young people with *SEN* or young people with a visual impairment. Resource base 2 does not have any kind of policy statement for transitions, but does follow a transition support pathway for visual impairment. Unsurprisingly, the special school had no general policy statement on post-16 transition support.

Connexions

The Special Educational Needs – Code of Practice states that the annual review ‘**must** involve the Connexions Service’ (DfES Publications, 2001). The head teacher of the school (or delegate such as the SENCO) is responsible for ensuring that a transition plan is drawn up, and should do so in consultation with Connexions. It is also hoped that they would serve the purpose of being the agency which oversees the collaboration of the other people who contribute to the transition planning. One indicator of how well this is working is the nature of the relationship is between Connexions and the various services providers.

Table 3: How often do (VTS) team members meet with Connexions Officer for students with visual impairments (not including the annual review) – Year 9

	Year 9 Statemented	Year 9 Statemented	Year 9 Not Statemented	Year 9 Not Statemented
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
All students	5	27.8%	2	11.1%
Most students	3	16.7%	3	16.7%
Some students	6	33.3%	5	27.8%
Rarely or never	3	16.7%	7	38.9%
Unsure	1	5.6%	1	5.6%
Total	18	100.0%	18	100.0%

Table 4: How often do (VTS) team members meet with Connexions Officer for students with visual impairments (not including the annual review) – Year 10

	Year 10 Statemented	Year 10 Statemented	Year 10 Not Statemented	Year 10 Not Statemented
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
All students	5	27.8%	2	11.1%
Most students	3	16.7%	3	16.7%
Some students	7	38.9%	6	33.3%
Rarely or never	2	11.1%	6	33.3%
Unsure	1	5.6%	1	5.6%
Total	18	100.0%	18	100.0%

Table 5: How often do (VTS) team members meet with Connexions Officer for students with visual impairments (not including the annual review) – Year 11

	Year 11 Statemented	Year 11 Statemented	Year 11 Not Statemented	Year 11 Not Statemented
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
All students	5	27.8%	2	11.1%
Most students	3	16.7%	3	16.7%
Some students	7	38.9%	6	33.3%
Rarely or never	2	11.1%	6	33.3%
Unsure	1	5.6%	1	5.6%
Total	18	100.0%	18	100.0%

These tables demonstrate the level of partnership with Connexions varies across the different service providers. Some services report they meet Connexions officers in relation to all students (across all years) whilst others rarely or never meet Connexions officers. As would be anticipated, there are less meetings to discuss non-statemented students. Nevertheless, likelihood of meeting Connexions officers does not seem to be linked to student year group.

The Local Authorities were also invited to comment on their relationship with Connexions. Again, the responses emphasised that the level of partnership varies greatly across authorities.

Service 1

'We are currently deliberately increasing our contact with Connexions officers, e.g. we have provided sensory awareness training to LDD champions and Connexions PAs in central and eastern areas...'

Service 9

'We only see connexions at Annual Reviews so don't see them for students without statements or at other times for students with statements.'

Other authorities seem to make decisions according to need, rather than general policy.

Service 17

'Contact is made as required, e.g. with a students who we had some issues with, contacted regularly.'

Both Resource Bases have Connexions officers who serve their resource base (two at Resource Base 1 and one at Resource Base 2). They also both reported that the resource base staff meet with the Connexions officer regarding all of their students with a visual impairment, across Years 9, 10 and 11. Resource Base 2 holds individual interviews in October/November and additional interviews as and when the need arises.

The special school has one Connexions Officer linked to the school, but no Connexions Learning Difficulties and Disabilities 'Champions'. They will meet with Connexions officers for all students with a visual impairment on an occasion separate from the annual review.

Section 139a (previously Section 140) of Learner Support Plan

At the time of the survey, the information was provided under Section 140, but this has since been replaced by Section 139a in the Learner Support Plan. However, as the original question referred to Section 140 this has been retained in the table titles.

Table 6: How often does the Local Authority give advice on the content of Section 140 of Learner Support Plan

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	6	35.29%	5	29.41%
Usually	5	29.41%	4	23.53%
Sometimes	6	35.29%	5	29.41%
Hardly ever or never	0	0%	3	17.65%
Total	17	100.00%	17	100.00%

Table 7: How often does the Local Authority write particular sections of the Section 140 of Learner Support Plan

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	4	25.00%	3	18.75%
Usually	1	6.25%	1	6.25%
Sometimes	4	25.00%	5	31.25%
Hardly ever or never	7	43.75%	7	43.75%
Total	16	100.00%	16	100.00%

Tables 6 and 7 demonstrate further that the support given by local authorities can differ greatly, with six local authorities that always give advice on content on the Section 140, but then six who would only 'sometimes' give advice. From this it is unclear whether this is due to the

policies of the local authorities, or alternatively if it's due to the policies of those involved in writing the document and who they choose to include. The local authorities were requested to comment on what aspects of transition support the advice covers. Those who did provide advice highlighted several important areas:

Service 1

'The sections regarding necessary arrangements to ensure access e.g. mobility training requirements, advice on presentation of work/print size, and any project equipment needs.'

Service 4:

'Acuity, functional vision, equipment, levels of support in education, information about sitting exams.'

Tables 6 and 7 also demonstrate that advice is less likely to be provided for those students without statements.

Service 9

'We are usually involved with pupils with a statements or who may require a statement – Year 11 pupils without statements therefore not in our remit other than general advice.'

Service 13 (regarding non-statemented students)

'We are always happy to be involved in the process but are often overlooked.'

The contribution to Section 140 of the Learner Support Plan for statemented young people also differs across the Resource Bases. Resource Base 2 reported that they always given advice on its content, whilst Resource Base 1 would only give advice 'sometimes'. Resource Base 1 also sometimes writes particular sections, whilst Resource Base 2 would hardly ever or never do so, and instead reports that the Connexions Officer writes up the report. Resource Base 2 also has the same policies for their non-statemented students, whilst Resource Base 1 marked this as not applicable, as all their students do have statements.

The special school would always give advice on the content of Section 140, but would only sometimes write particular sections of it.

3.3 Statements, annual review and transition planning

Annual reviews

For a fully person-centred transition review with all relevant agencies in attendance, a representative from the Local Authority and Connexions should be in attendance. Therefore, for all annual reviews (at least those with statements) we would expect all relevant bodies to be in attendance. For those students with a statement, having an Annual Review is a formal part of the statementing process. However, it could still be anticipated that students without a statement will still have some form of annual review process. In designing and piloting the questionnaire we decided to use the term ‘annual review’ in a generic way. This may have been ambiguous for participants who may have interpreted ‘annual review’ to mean the statutory review associated with the statement of SEN, or something more general which would include, for example, reviews of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or target setting. Follow-up interviews confirmed that while respondents did have a range of working definitions of ‘Annual Reviews’, they understood what we meant by ‘annual review’ in relation to non-statemented students.

Table 8: How often would a (VTS) team member attend an annual review meeting for a Year 9 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent
Always	13	76.47%	5	35.71%
Usually	3	17.65%	5	35.71%
Sometimes	1	5.88%	1	7.14%
Hardly ever or never	0	0%	2	14.29%
Unsure	0	0%	1	7.14%
Total	17	100.0%	14	100.00%

Table 9: How often would a (VTS) team member attend an annual review meeting for a Year 10 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent
Always	13	76.47%	5	35.71
Usually	3	17.65%	5	35.71
Someti mes	1	5.88%	1	7.14
Hardly ever or never	0	0%	2	14.29
Unsure	0	0%	1	7.14
Total	17	100.00%	14	100.00

Table 10: How often would a (VTS) team member attend an annual review for a Year 11 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	13	76.47%	5	35.71%
Usually	3	17.65%	5	35.71%
Someti mes	1	5.88%	1	7.14%
Hardly ever or never	0	0%	2	14.29%
Unsure	0	0%	1	7.14%
Total	17	100.0%	14	100.00%

Encouragingly VTS team members are attending the annual reviews 'always' or 'usually' for 94% of those students with statements. However, this is only the case for 68% of those without statements.

The local authorities were asked to comment further on the answers that they had given to these questions, and this often highlights the range of policies regarding statementing:

Service 6

'Funding through banded funding process instead of statement increasingly common – fewer students having statements. Annual review process less relevant'

Service 9

'Pupils without statements do not have Annual Reviews and therefore transition is the responsibility of the school and we are not involved. For pupils with statements they are always part of the annual review.'

Service 13

'Variable practice depends on the school, the service and how they operate.'

Service 16

'Our highest priority is meeting the needs of our statemented pupils. Non-statemented pupils are not allocated the same level of support – therefore we cannot always attend all meetings.'

Once a child is statemented, the Local Authority has legal responsibilities to meet in terms of the support they should provide. Therefore, as we would expect, priority is given to the statemented students to ensure that their needs are met.

Nevertheless, the significance of the students' statement is linked to a given VTS's (and Local Authority's) approach to statementing. As discussed this is not consistent between VTSs. In a later section we highlight how this has implications for the interpretation of our findings. For example, there are still 5 services that would always attend the 'annual reviews' of their non-statemented students – Services 2, 4, 10, 11 and 13.

Table 11: How often would a Connexions Officer attend an annual review meeting for a Year 9 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	6	35.29%	0	0.00%
Usually	6	35.29%	1	6.67%
Sometimes	4	23.53%	5	33.33%
Hardly ever or never	0	0.00%	3	20.00%
Unsure	1	5.88%	6	40.00%
Total	17	100.00%	15	100.00%

Table 12: How often would a Connexions Officer attend an annual review meeting for a Year 10 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	6	35.29%	0	0.00
Usually	8	47.06%	2	12.5
Sometimes	2	11.76%	4	25.0
Hardly ever or never	0	0.00%	3	18.75
Unsure	1	5.88%	7	43.75
Total	17	100.00%	16	100.00

Table 13: How often would a Connexions Officer attend an annual review meeting for a Year 11 student?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	7	38.89%	0	0.00%
Usually	10	55.56%	2	12.5%
Sometimes	0	0.00%	5	31.25%
Hardly ever or never	0	0.00%	2	12.5%
Unsure	1	5.56%	7	43.75%
Total	18	100.00%	16	100.00%

As Connexions staff are responsible for ensuring that transition plans are implemented, and transition plans are generally drawn up during annual review meetings (as demonstrated in Tables 11-13 above), it is important that they are in attendance at these meetings. However, we see from these tables the local authorities reported that Connexions are not always there, in particular for those students without statements in some local authorities. Nevertheless, overall Connexions Officers appear most likely to attend annual reviews for students with statements in Year 11.

Both resource bases reported that they would always be in attendance at the annual review meetings for young people with a visual impairment (as would be anticipated due to it being the schools responsibility to arrange the appointment). Interestingly they both reported that Connexions officers will attend the annual reviews meetings for all their students with visual impairments, across all three years groups. This could be due to the fact that they actually have a Connexions officer linked to their resource base, making communications and arrangements easier. The same is true of the Special School which also reported that Connexions officers would attend annual review meetings for all students.

Transition Plans

Over 80% of the services reported that transition reviews are typically held as part of the annual review meeting for Year 9, 10 and 11 students with a statement. The practice varies a lot more, however, for those

without a statement. For students without a statement, 4 services reported that the transition review is usually part of the annual review, 3 reported that it's held separately and 7 said that it varies between the two.

The students at both resource bases and the special school would usually have their transition review as part of the annual review meeting.

Table 14: How much input does the VTS have in the preparation of transition plans? – Year 9

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
A lot	10	58.82%	6	37.5%
Quite a bit	2	11.76%	1	6.25%
Some	4	23.53%	3	18.75%
A little or none	0	0.00%	3	18.75%
Unsure	0	0.00%	2	12.5%
Varies	1	5.88%	1	6.25%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 15: How much input does the VTS have in the preparation of transition plans? – Year 10

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
A lot	10	58.82%	6	37.5%
Quite a bit	4	23.53%	1	6.25%
Some	2	11.76%	2	12.5%
A little or none	0	0.00%	3	18.75%
Unsure	0	0.00%	3	18.75%
Varies	1	5.88%	1	6.25%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 16: How much input does the VTS have in the preparation of transition plans? – Year 11

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
A lot	10	58.82%	6	37.5%
Quite a bit	4	11.76%	1	6.25%
Some	2	23.53%	3	18.75%
A little or none	0	0.00%	3	18.75%
Unsure	0	0.00%	2	12.5%
Varies	1	5.88%	1	6.25%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

We see from Tables 14 to 16 that most services stated that they give input in the preparation of transition plans. As you would expect, the most input is given to those students with a statement, for example, ten services reported that they would give a lot of input for those with statements whilst only 6 reported that they would give a lot of input for those without statements.

The special school stated that they give a lot of input in the preparation of transition plans for all years, as do resource base 2. Resource base 1 describing giving ‘quite a bit of input’.

Looking at the responses which individual VTSs gave, we see some considerable difference between their policies. For example, Service 1 would only give ‘some’ support for both statemented and non-statemented students. In contrast, Service 4 would give a lot of input for all their students.

Table 17: Does the VTS have enough involvement in the transitions plans of students with visual impairments? Year 9

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes, enough	15	88.2%	8	50.0%
No, not enough	1	5.9%	2	12.5%
Unsure	1	5.9%	5	31.3%
Varies	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 18: Does the VTS have enough involvement in the transitions plans of students with visual impairments? Year 10

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes, enough	15	88.2%	8	50.0%
No, not enough	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
Unsure	2	11.8%	6	37.5%
Varies	0	0.0%	1	6.3%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 19: Does the VTS have enough involvement in the transitions plans of students with visual impairments? Year 11

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes, enough	16	94.1%	8	50.0%
No, not enough	0	0.00%	1	6.3%
Unsure	1	5.9%	6	37.5%
Varies	0	0.00%	1	6.3%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Tables 17 - 19 show that on the whole VTS are confident that they are having enough involvement in the transitions plans of students with visual impairments across the three years for those students with a statement. However, only 50% of the VTS are confident in their level of involvement for those students without a statement, and there is clearly greater uncertainty.

Both resource bases and the special school report that they have enough involvement in transition planning (although it is important to remember that all their students are statemented).

Table 20: Does the VTS receive copies of transition plans? Year 9

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	12	75.0%	5	31.3%
No	2	12.5%	5	31.3%
Varies	2	12.5%	6	37.5%
Total	16	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 21: Does the VTS receive copies of transition plans? Year 10

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	10	58.8%	5	31.3%
No	2	11.8%	5	31.3%
Varies	5	29.4%	6	37.5%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 22: Does the VTS receive copies of transition plans? Year 11

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	11	64.7%	5	31.3%
No	2	11.8%	5	31.3%
Varies	4	23.5%	6	37.5%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

The multi-agency approach to transition planning states that all those involved in supporting a child should be involved in the transition process. Therefore it is important for VTS to have copies of the transition plans so they know how best to support the students on their caseload. Tables 20 to 22 demonstrate that not all services have been receiving these transition plans, particularly so for those students without statements. Both resource bases reported that they would receive copies of transition plans for their students across the three years.

Table 23: Do the transitions plans help you develop your support for each student? Year 9

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	10	62.5%	7	46.7%
Unsure	3	18.8%	3	20.0%
Not applicable	3	18.8%	5	33.3%
Total	16	100.0%	15	100.0%

Table 24: Do the transitions plans help you develop your support for each student? Year 10

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	9	56.3%	7	46.7%
Unsure	4	25.0%	3	20.0%
Not applicable	3	18.8%	5	33.3%
Total	16	100.0%	15	100.0%

Table 25: Do the transitions plans help you develop your support for each student? Year 11

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	10	62.5%	7	46.7%
Unsure	3	18.8%	3	20.0%
Not applicable	3	18.8%	5	33.3%
Total	16	100.0%	15	100.0%

From Tables 23 to 25 we see that none of the services said that the Transition Plans were unhelpful in developing support for their students, although some did say that they are unsure if they help or not. More have found it helpful for their statemented students. This could be because the services have different responsibilities to meet for these students (and are more likely to receive the plans anyway).

Resource base 2 and the Special School have both found that the transition plans they receive help them to develop their support for their students in all three years. Resource base 1 differed, however, and found that they don't help them develop their support for any of their students.

The services were invited to make any other comments about transition plans or annual reviews.

Service 14 reported that they were committed to helping their students through developing their own transition plans (apparently independently of the statutory transition plan), and also highlighted the difficulties they faced in working in partnership with the other agencies:

‘Our service has developed its own 14-19 transition plan which each QTVI uses with all statemented pupils and with some higher input pupils without statements. Information gathered on these phases sometimes overlaps with Connexions planning or other local authority planning. Visits to update these plans take place regularly and ensure that we, as a team, have a good overview of all pupil transition planning and can ensure that VI issues are properly flagged up to relevant professionals. Attendance at Annual Reviews can be variable but largely due to the QTVI being overlooked by some SENCOs when inviting to Reviews. (Sometimes we have to be pro-active in getting ourselves invited).’

Whilst it is encouraging that this service is taking the initiative to introduce their own transition plans, this demonstrates a lack of multi-agency transition planning, where all the relevant agencies meet together. As highlighted in the statement above, this results in ‘overlaps with Connexions planning’. It could be anticipated that this could be an inefficient process, also could result in students and their parent/carers receiving conflicting advice and information.

Service 12 presented a different story. This Service reported that transition plans help them to develop their support for all their students:

‘I feel that we are ahead in transition planning as we take a lead role in working directly with Connexions and negotiating packages of support via contracts with colleges. We also keep a detailed record of transition issues via our transition proforma which commences at year 9 and is updated by QTVIs annually. This proforma informs the annual transition meetings which is held every May.’

The importance of statements

Findings reported above suggest that the statement of SEN is an important factor in determining the transitions support offered to students with visual impairments. However, different VTS appear to have different policies in relation to statementing, e.g. in the questionnaire

Service 18 described “[we] do not statement pupils with VI therefore support available varies according to degree of VI.” Therefore these policy differences must be accounted for when we interpret findings in relation to statementing. To clarify this further we carried out follow up short telephone discussions with four services who had reported low proportions of statemented students. In particular we explored how the absence or presence of a statement influenced the transitions support a student would receive both from *and* beyond the VTS.

Three of the four heads of VTS we spoke to told us that their service explicitly avoided statementing students with visual impairments. The key reason given was that the statementing process was costly and time consuming and that necessary support could be provided without the need of students having a statement. The different VTS had different ways of allocating resources to students, e.g. using a ‘student allocation panel’ in one authority and a banding system in another. However, as would be expected given their policies in relation to statementing, all three of the VTS had models in place which meant that services they offered were *not* linked to the absence or presence of a statement.

However, in terms of support beyond VTS it was more interesting. Service 11 described having an ‘integrated service’ in which other agencies (e.g. Connexions) had a shared understanding of the importance (or otherwise) of the statement. As an example, there was not a problem of students with visual impairments who did not have a statement, in accessing Connexions services for a transitions review.

Services 13 and 18 both felt that there was a ‘disconnection’, and it was therefore important for the VTS to contact other agencies such as Connexions or Transition Social Workers to ensure that transition support was being given appropriately. Indeed, Service 18 highlighted that the ‘biggest disadvantage of not having a statement is at transition because the post 14 planning doesn’t automatically kick in’. It was felt that VTS could successfully initiate this, but it did come at a cost of increased workload. Even so, they believed that this was still preferable to statementing. It is unclear whether the amount of funding received by Connexions is linked to whether a student is statemented or not, and this is something which it would be necessary to investigate further.

Related to the general theme of statementing, Service 13 was concerned that with the creation of more ‘Academies’ (which are managed and funded outside the LA) that there may be increased uncertainty about responsibilities for support of students with visual

impairments who don't have statements. Therefore, it may be necessary for the service/LA to increase the number of statements in the future to ensure sufficient support for students with visual impairments is maintained.

Work Experience placements

Work Experience is particularly useful for students with visual impairments in helping them make decisions about their future and the transition from education into paid employment. This means that Work Experience placements are a very important part of their school curriculum.

Table 26: Do students with visual impairments have work experience placements? – Year 9

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	7	46.67%	6	46.15%
Usually	2	13.33%	2	15.38%
Sometimes	2	13.33%	0	0.00%
Hardly ever or never	3	20.00%	3	23.08%
Unsure	1	6.67%	2	15.38%
Total	15	100.00%	13	100.00%

Table 27: Do students with visual impairments have work experience placements? – Year 10

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	8	47.1%	6	37.5%
Usually	9	52.9%	9	56.3%
Sometimes	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Hardly ever or never	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Unsure	0	0.00%	1	6.3%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

Table 28: Do students with visual impairments have work experience placements? – Year 11

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Always	8	47.06%	7	43.75%
Usually	8	47.06%	7	43.75%
Sometimes	1	5.88%	1	0.625%
Hardly ever or never	0	0.00%	1	0.625%
Unsure	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	17	100.0%	16	100.00%

Tables 26 to 28 demonstrate that on the whole students with visual impairments appear to have work experience at some stage over Years 9-11, particularly in Years 10 and 11 (although the VTS have reported that they don't have work experience in all years, this is because students wouldn't tend to have work experience in every one of the three years).

Most likely linked to the policies in the given school, resource base 1 reported that their students would 'always' have work experience in year 11, but hardly ever or never in Year 9 and 10. Similarly, resource base 2 reported that their students always have work experience in Year 10. Work experience is less certain for students at the special school where they 'usually' have work experience in Year 11, but hardly ever or never have it in Years 9 and 10.

Table 29: How easy is it to find appropriate work experience placements for students with visual impairments?

	Those with statements	Those with statements	Those without statements	Those without statements
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Very easy	1	5.9%	1	6.67%
Easy	1	5.9%	3	20.00%
Difficult	13	76.5%	6	40.00%
Very difficult	1	5.9%	0	0.00%
Unsure	1	5.9%	5	33.33%
Total	17	100.0%	15	100.0%

Table 29 illustrates the challenge which is faced for students with visual impairments in their pursuit for work experience. 14 of the 17 VTS reported that they find it difficult or very difficult to find work experience placements for those statemented students with visual impairments who have a statement. This is lower for those without statements, where only 6 out of 15 reported finding it difficult, and none 'very difficult', although 5 were unsure, suggesting that their responses are possibly more due to lack of participation in helping students in finding their work placements.

The Special School reported that their students would hardly ever or never have work experience placements in Years 9 and 10, but usually do so in Year 11. They reported that finding an appropriate work experience place is 'not easy but not difficult – some students present a challenge.'

Table 30: Thinking about work experience placements in particular, does the VTS:

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly ever or never	Unsure	Total
Provide written advice to work placement sites	1	7	6	3	0	17
Work directly with the work placement coordinator in each school	1	10	5	1	0	17
Work directly with the SENCO in each school	3	8	4	0	1	16
Undertake an environmental audit	0	7	9	1	0	17
Undertake a health and safety audit	0	3	10	2	1	16
Provide training to host staff	0	3	8	5	0	16
Provide general advice	2	8	7	0	0	17
Visit a work placement site during the placement	0	6	8	3	0	17
Arrange a work placement for a VI student	0	2	8	7	0	17
Arrange of provide mobility training for a VI student	1	4	11	1	0	17
Provide adaptive materials and/or specialist equipment	1	2	10	4	0	17

We can see from Table 30 again that the support available to the students differs according to which authority or service they are based in. There are examples of real contrast – for example, one service stated that they would always provide written advice to work placement sites, whilst 3 stated they would hardly ever or never do this.

Resource Base 2 reported that they are very active in providing support and advice for their students' work experience placements. They would always work in conjunction with the authority's mobility officer in visiting the work placement site in advance in order to undertake an environmental audit, undertake a health and safety audit, provide training to host staff and provide general advice. They would also always work directly with the work placement coordinator in the school and arrange or provide mobility training for a student.

Resource base 1 works differently, and instead has a business manager/achievement coordinator who would take on these responsibilities. The LA service would provide mobility training for the student.

The special school reported providing a lot of support for their students, and answered 'always' or 'usually' for all categories.

Table 31: What other types of careers activities do students with visual impairments take during Year 9 to 11?

	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever or never	Unsure	Total
Link course with FE college	1	12	3	1	17
Overnight stay at residential college	1	11	3	2	17
Visit to FE or sixth form	10	7	1	0	18
Visit to workplace or WBT	0	12	3	2	17
Attended workshops/seminars	0	11	4	2	17
Voluntary work	0	6	3	7	16
Mini-enterprise scheme	0	10	1	5	16
Time with role model/mentor	1	6	5	5	17
Careers fairs/conventions	3	11	1	2	17
Activities arranged by family/Friends	1	8	0	9	18

Local authorities were asked to comment on the other types of career activities that students with a visual impairment take part in during Years 9 to 11. Table 31 shows that whilst many of these activities are available to the students, it varies who makes use of these opportunities. The vast majority of these activities would be outside of school time, and so it

would largely depend on the student and the encouragement they receive from their family in attending. Some services reported taking the initiative in setting up programmes specific for the students they support. For example, Services 1 and 17 have set up Transition Days.

The students at resource base 2 would 'take part in the school's careers/options programme'. This could include a link course with a further education/specialist college, overnight stays at a residential college, visits to further education/sixth form/specialist colleges, visits to employment or work-based training. In contrast, at resource base 1 the activities that their students would tend to get involved in would be workshops/seminars given by representatives from companies/organisations, a mini-enterprise scheme, spending time with role models or mentors and attending career fairs/conventions or other specialist career events.

There are less options available to those students at the special school, where they would 'sometimes' visit places of employment or work-based training or do a mini-enterprise scheme.

3.4 Other support and advice

Table 32: Who do the Local Authorities provide advice and training to?

Has your service provided advice or support to?	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	Unsure (n)	Unsure (%)
Connexions Officers	12	66.7%	6	33.3%	0	0.00%
School-based careers or transition staff	11	61.1%	7	38.9%	0	0.00%
School based SENCOs	11	64.71%	5	29.41%	1	5.88%
FE or HE staff	15	93.75%	1	6.25%	0	0.00%
Employers	2	11.1%	15	83.3%	1	5.6%
Parents	14	82.35%	3	17.65%	0	0.00%
VI students in FE institutions in local authority or elsewhere	11	61.1%	7	38.9%	0	0.00%
VI students in HE institutions in local authority or elsewhere	7	38.9%	11	61.1%	0	0.00%

As various people and services will be involved in providing transition support for students with visual impairments, it is important that they have some understanding of the needs of the students. The most obvious place they could get this advice is through the Local Authority Visual Impairment team report. Table 32 demonstrates that different

authorities have different policies on who they will give advice and training to. It is very uncommon for VTS to report giving advice to employers (presumably this being seen by most as the responsibility of adult services).

Table 33 shows the responses given by each Service and provides a count of the responses given for this question.

Table 33: The reported number of people/services offered advice and training by VTS

	Yes	No	Unsure
Service 1	6	2	0
Service 2	4	4	0
Service 3	2	6	0
Service 4	5	3	0
Service 5	4	4	0
Service 6	3	5	0
Service 7	5	3	0
Service 8	5	1	2
Service 9	3	5	0
Service 10	7	1	0
Service 11	7	1	0
Service 12	6	2	0
Service 13	7	1	0
Service 14	6	2	0
Service 15	0	5	3
Service 16	5	3	0
Service 17	4	4	0
Service 18	4	3	0

Table 33 details how the amount of support and advice given to the different groups involved in providing support for students with visual impairments differs between different services. For example, out of the eight groups listed, Services 10, 11 and 13 provide support for 7 of them. (Service 10 doesn't provide support to parents, Service 11 doesn't provide support to employers and service 13 doesn't provide support to Connexions). In contrast, Service 15 wouldn't provide any support to five of the eight groups, and is unsure on the other 3 groups.

Further details are given by the services on the types of advice and support that they offer.

The services were invited to describe the general training or advice that they gave to each of the six groups. The type of advice given was similar across the different groups.

General advice and support

Some of the services reporting offering generic advice and support to the different groups.

Service 6 – Connexions

‘Advice and information re. specialist post-16 placements’

Service 9 – FE or HE Staff

‘We have given general advice to local FE colleges about the type of support we have provided, adaptations to text needed and any specialist equipment – although FE colleges generally don’t have specialist equipment and students are not eligible for access funding in the same way as they are in HE.’

Service 4 – Parents or carers

‘General advice via annual review meeting or ongoing liaison’

Awareness

Advice was also given to help improve the awareness and understanding of those involved in supporting the young people with visual impairments.

Service 10 – Connexions

‘VI awareness for disability and inclusion connexions officers’

Service 7 – FE or HE Staff

‘Worked with FE staff to understand implications of VI’

Service 10 – Employers

‘Post 16 VI has provided one-day and twilight training sessions for agencies from health and social care, medics, Job CentrePlus, FE colleges, training providers, transition coordinators, Youth Service.’

Advice and support specific to individual young people

A lot of emphasis given by the services was towards advice specific to individual young people:

Service 4 – Connexions Officers

‘Advice about individual children, their needs and possible options to consider’

Service 8 – Connexions Officers

‘Whether their career choice is realistic or appropriate for the student’

Service 7 – School-based SENCOs

‘Advice/discussions around particular student(s)’

Service 17 – FE or HE Staff

‘When pupil moves into FE written report send on eye condition etc, and visits arranged if felt necessary.’

Service 1 – Parents or Carers

‘Advice has been given on an individual basis’

Tables 32 and 33, and the further comments made by the VTS would suggest that they are taking the initiative in sharing the specialist knowledge that they have with the different groups involved in supporting young people with visual impairments. However, the nature of this advice tends to vary from service to service.

3.5 General reflections about the quality of the services and other comments

Ratings of the quality of the transitions support

Table 34: Please rate the quality of support provided to students with visual impairments in relation to transition?

Quality of support provided to VI students	By Connexions (n)	By Connexions (%)	By Schools (n)	By Schools (%)	By VTS (n)	By VTS (%)
High	2	12.5%	2	11.11%	10	55.56%
Medium-high	5	31.25%	9	50.00%	6	33.33%
Medium-poor	4	25.00%	3	16.67%	1	5.56%
Poor	1	6.25%	1	5.56%	0	0.00%
Unsure	4	25.00%	3	16.67%	1	5.56%
Total	16	100.00 %	18	100.00 %	18	100.00 %

Table 34 shows that the VTS don't always rate the quality of support in relation to transition for students with visual impairments highly. Only 5 out of 16 of the authorities rated the quality of support by Connexions as high or medium-high. In contrast, 11 out of 18 rated the support by Schools as high or medium-high. In greater contrast still, 16 out of 18 rated their own services in relation to transition as high or medium-high.

A further important consideration is the quality of links between the various agencies. As the transition process is so multi-agency, it is important that good links are established.

Table 35: Rate the quality of links between agencies

	VTS and Connexions (n)	VTS and Connexions (%)	VTS and Schools (n)	VTS and Schools (%)	Schools and Connexions (n)	Schools and Connexions (%)
High	5	29.4%	12	70.6%	5	31.3%
Medium-high	8	47.1%	4	23.5%	6	37.5%
Medium-poor	2	11.8%	0	0.00%	1	6.3%
Poor	1	5.9%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Unsure	1	5.9%	1	5.9%	4	25.00%
Total	17	100.0%	17	100.0%	16	100.0%

13 out of 18 of the services rated the quality of links between the VTS and Connexions as high or medium-high. They reported that the links between VTS and schools are better, with 16 out of 17 saying that the quality is high or medium high (12 of these services describing the quality of link as 'high'). The relationship between schools and Connexions was rated a little lower (11 out of 16 VTS reported this as high or medium high) – but, of course, the VTS would have less direct experience of this relationship.

Resource Bases 1 and 2 described the support received by the students by all the different agencies as high, and similarly the links between the agencies as being of a high quality.

The special school provided a different perspective, suggesting that the support offered by Connexions is medium-high, the support by their school is high, but the support by the VTS is only rated as medium-poor. It also describes the link between the school and Connexions service as medium high.

Table 36: Please rate the overall quality of post-16 transitions support provided to VI students

	Frequency	Percent (%)
High	5	31.25%
Medium-high	7	46.67%
Medium-poor	3	18.75%
Poor	0	0.00%
Unsure	1	6.25%
Total	16	100.00%

Table 36 shows that only 5 out of 16 of the services rated the overall quality of post-16 transitions support as high, suggesting that they believe that there is potential for improvement. However, both resource bases rated the overall support as high, and the special school rated it as medium-high.

Overall strengths and weaknesses of the transitions support

The respondents were asked to ‘please use the following space to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of post-16 transitions support for students with a visual impairment in your local authority.’

Connexions

Many services suggested that one improvement that was needed was the links between themselves and Connexions, and also an improvement in the service offered by Connexions.

Service 1:

‘Weaknesses – Connexions support/advice is variable. They do not always attend annual review meetings for statemented pupils.’

Service 6:

‘Challenges: Connexions personnel changes affect continuity’

Service 16

‘Needs improving in terms of Connexions/VI service links

Size

Some service also made reference to their size, and the difference that made in terms of service provision. The comments from Services 2 and

6 suggest a belief that links are easier to create when the services are smaller and there are less people to get involved.

Service 2:

‘As it is a small LEA (and everyone knows everyone) it is easy to develop strong links with schools, careers etc.’

Service 6:

‘Strengths – Links with Connexions on a personal level due to small teams (1 QTVI is responsible for KS3 and 4)’

Restrictions

Reference is also made to some of the limitations that the services face when providing support.

Service 17:

‘We are aware that this is an area we need to develop but like many other services, we do not have the capacity to expand without other services we deliver being adversely affected.’

Need to improve support beyond age 16

Several of the services highlighted the potential problems of young people moving onto larger post-16 colleges, where the support that they are entitled to is less clearly defined.

Service 13:

‘It would be rewarding to know what happens to VI young people at 18, 20, etc. How many drop out of courses, or just finish them and then stay at home. There is a transition social worker who tracks some young people but we could and should do more.’

Service 6:

‘FE/HE support dependent on college/university purchasing provision – affects involvement in transition process and also job security/continuity.’

Service 13:

‘Transition to post-16 provision needs to be carefully planned. In many cases this does not happen. At the age of 14-15 a VI young person may be very aware of what they can’t do. The move to a new setting at 16 can be very frightening.’

Service 8:

‘One main area of concern in our case is that pupils find it difficult moving from a highly supported environment (VI Resource) to Tertiary College where specialist support and understanding of their needs is not fully grasped.’

Varying support from Schools

As the head teacher of the school is the one responsible for setting up annual reviews and transition meetings, and inviting relevant people along, it can be anticipated that the success of the transition support can largely depend on the school which the student attends. Comments by Services 7 and 18 demonstrated that the support can differ from school to school – something which has been referenced to in other responses to questions throughout the questionnaire.

Service 7:

‘Support offered by Connexions and schools is mixed and depends on individual Connexions adviser or school.’

Service 18:

‘Support variable from school to school’

‘Any other comments’

The respondents were also asked to ‘please give any other comments you have regarding post-16 transitions support for students with a visual impairment’.

Post-16

Many of the services identified the need to ensure that post-16 support is provided.

Service 8

‘The VI service should be fully extended into post-16 provision – giving advice and monitoring progress.’

Service 14

‘Important and helpful to all concerned if early links formed with pupils who will be transferring to post-16 settings.’

Advice

Service 6 shows that they have taken initiative in providing additional support that they consider useful to their students:

'VI teams produces directory of information for pupils when they leave LA school'.

Whist Service 12 has seen ways in which they could improve the support they offer:

'It would be useful to be able to provide more information to our young people about what jobs they may or may not be able to do because of their visual impairment. This can often be a stumbling block for Connexions also. Perhaps some specific training in this area would be of help to QTVIs'

Importance of suitable support within schools

Other services described how schools are not simply there to provide academic support, and that the fact that there are other needs which they need to meet. In addition, for those moving onto local colleges, they emphasise that it is important to ensure that the student is well supported in this move.

Service 13

'Several factors affect how well a young person makes the transition to post-16 provision. Often schools concentrate on academic success but young people need to develop social skills, mobility and communication skills and self confidence. The VI young people may be the only person in their school with a visual difficulty and feel isolated.'

Service 14

'Important and helpful to all concerned if early links formed with pupils who will be transferring to post-16 settings. Advice can be given re. local colleges/courses to pupils, parents etc and level of support available.'

4 Conclusions

This survey of specialist visual impairment teaching services provides a helpful insight into the complexity of transitions planning for students with visual impairment. It helps identify broad areas of concern and raises questions which need further investigation. Nevertheless, it is important to accept the limitations of the methods used in this research – inevitably the self-completion questionnaires gather information from only one perspective within a complex multi-agency system.

In this final section we overview the broad report findings (from which the bullet points in the executive summary have been abstracted).

Unsurprisingly, the 21 survey responses included services of varying sizes, e.g. VTS ranged in terms of numbers of teaching staff (ranging from 1 to 12 full time teachers) and numbers of students supported in years 9 and 11 (ranging from 1 student to 43 students).

The data also shows that the proportion of students with a visual impairment receiving a statement of special educational need differs across local authorities (although all eligible students at the Resource Base and Special School had statements of special educational need). More detailed research would be required to clarify the nature of these differences in statementing policy across VTS. However, preliminary follow-up discussions with heads of service indicate that some services have ‘low statementing policies’ in which support offered to students is not linked to the presence or absence of a statement. Given these different statementing policies, any overall patterns across the surveyed VTS which link transition planning and statementing cannot be generalised to all VTS: in many authorities a statement is important in gaining access to transition services, while in some it is not relevant. Nevertheless, there is evidence that in authorities where statements are used less it may be necessary for the VTS to work proactively with schools and other agencies to ensure students are able to access transitions services.

The empirical confirmation that VTS vary in terms of policy emphasis is a useful finding in itself. Nevertheless it suggests that further research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of how VTS operate, particularly in relation to transition support. Such follow-up research may benefit from using a more detailed case study approach. The range of policies adopted by different VTS also has implications for interpretation of many of the findings elsewhere in the report. Such a variety of VTS practice

means that aggregated findings (in which questionnaire responses are ‘averaged’ together) can be ambiguous – for this reason findings must be interpreted appropriately and we remind the reader of this throughout.

4.1 Key findings

Post-16 transition policies and links

Some local authorities appear to have more developed policies in relation to post-16 transition support than others, although some VTS draw upon more general policies, rather than having visual impairment specific ones.

The level of reported partnership with Connexions differs across the VTS, with Connexions Officers attending annual review meetings for students with visual impairment students more regularly in some local authorities than others. On the whole, Connexions Officers are more likely to attend annual review meetings for students with statements (compared to students without statements). The level of contact that the VTS have with Connexions outside of the annual review meetings also seems to vary between the different local authorities. The Resource Bases and Special School all have Connexions Officers linked to their school (and consequently report greater level of contact).

The amount of input given by VTS in the production of the Learner Support Plan appears to differ across the local authorities, although they will offer greater advice for those students with a statement. The advice VTS give tends to be specific to the students needs, such as mobility training, and information for sitting exams. It is rarer, however, for VTS to provide *written* contributions to the Learner Support Plan.

Statements, annual review and transition planning

Given the range of approaches to statementing, the term ‘annual review’ appears ambiguous – ‘annual review’ can be taken to mean the statutory review associated with the statement of SEN, or something more general which would include, for example, reviews of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or target setting. Nevertheless, representatives from the VTS report attending annual reviews for most students with a statement, but are less likely to attend for those without a statement. Similarly, Connexions officers are reported to attend annual reviews less frequently, particularly for non-statemented students. Staff from the

resource bases and special school report always being in attendance at an annual review, along with the Connexions Officers attached to the schools.

Transition plans are formal written records which aim to 'plan coherently for the young person's transition into adult life' (Special Educational Needs Code of Practice). Over 80% of the services reported that transition reviews are typically held as part of the annual review meeting for Year 9, 10 and 11 students with a statement, but the practice varies a lot more for those without a statement. The students at both resource bases and the special school (all of whom had statements) would usually have their transition review as part of the annual review meeting. Most VTS give input in the preparation of transition plans, in particular for those with statements (although policies differ between the local authorities). The majority also reported that they found the transition plans useful in delivering their service.

Overall, the VTS reported they were confident in their level of involvement in transition planning for students with visual impairment with a statement, but only 50% are confident in their level of involvement for those students without a statement. Perhaps this is unsurprising because students with statements have a statutory entitlement to specialist support in relation to transition planning, including access to services from other agencies (e.g. Connexions). Given this, is access to this specialist transition support limited for non-statemented students with a visual impairment in authorities with a 'low-statementing policy'? Follow-up discussions with some heads of service with a 'low-statementing policy' indicate that in these authorities the statement is not a factor in a student's ability to access these services, although it is necessary for the VTS to work proactively with schools and other agencies to ensure that this is the case.

Work placements

Experience of work though work placements is useful for students with visual impairments in helping them make decisions about their future and the transition from education into paid employment. Those students linked to a VTS or Resource Base were highly likely to have a work placement at some point between Year 9 and 11. However, this was reported as less certain for those attending the single special school involved in the survey.

However, the VTS reported that finding suitable work placements for their students with visual impairment was difficult. Also the level of support provided by the different VTS in terms of work placements varied, with some having much more involvement than the others. Similarly, the range of career activities (e.g. links and visits to FE and sixth form colleges, careers fairs/conventions and links with voluntary work) that are available to Year 9 to 11 students appears to differ according to where they are located.

Other support and advice

Several of the VTS report being involved in providing support and advice to the other services involved in supporting students with visual impairment. Advice is given, in particular, to FE or HE Staff. The advice given ranges from advice and support regarding specific young people, to general advice and support including awareness training.

General reflections about the quality of the services and other comments

There appears to be a consensus amongst VTS respondents that the transition support for students with visual impairment could be improved, particularly by Connexions and the local mainstream school. Similarly, many suggest that the quality of links between agencies (VTS-Connexions links in particular) needs to be improved. Several of the services highlighted the potential problems of young people moving onto larger post-16 colleges, where the support that they are entitled to is less clearly defined.

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